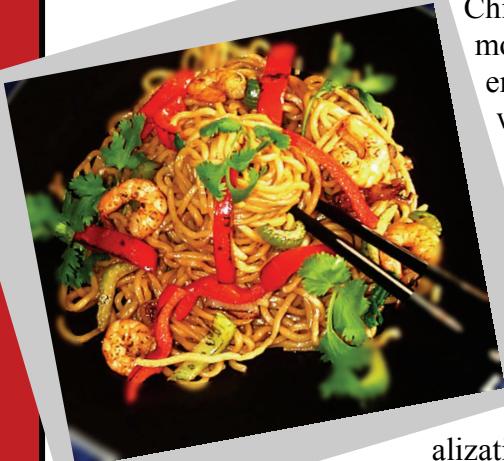


# Chinese Cuisine

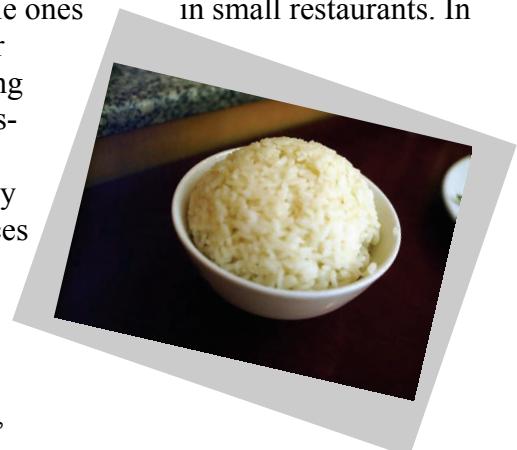


Chinese cuisine is widely seen as representing one of the richest and most diverse culinary heritages in the world. It originated in different regions of China and has been introduced to other parts of the world — from Southeast Asia to North America and Western Europe.

A meal in Chinese culture is typically seen as consisting of two general components: (1) a carbohydrate source or starch (*zhushí*, lit. "main food", staple) — typically rice, noodles, or *mantou* (steamed buns), and (2) accompanying dishes of vegetables, fish, meat, or other items, known as (*cài*, lit. "vegetable") in the Chinese language. This cultural conceptualization is in some ways in contrast to Western meals where meat or animal protein is often considered the main dish.

As is well known throughout the world, rice is a critical part of much of Chinese cuisine. However, in many parts of China, particularly North China, wheat-based products including noodles and steamed buns predominate, in contrast to South China where rice is dominant. Despite the importance of rice in Chinese cuisine, at extremely formal occasions, it is sometimes the case that no rice at all will be served; in such a case, rice would only be provided when no other dishes remained, or as a token dish at the end of the meal. Soup is usually served at the end of a meal to satiate one's appetite. Owing to western influences, serving soup in the beginning of a meal is also quite normal in modern times.

Chopsticks are the primary eating utensil in Chinese culture for solid foods, while soups and other liquids are enjoyed with a wide, flat-bottomed spoon (traditionally made of ceramic). It is reported that wooden chopsticks are losing their dominance due to recent logging shortfalls in China and East Asia; many Chinese eating establishments are considering a switch to a more environmentally sustainable eating utensil, such as plastic or bamboo chopsticks. More expensive materials used in the past included ivory and silver. On the other hand, disposable chopsticks made of wood/bamboo have all but replaced reusable ones in small restaurants. In most dishes in Chinese cuisine, food is prepared in smaller pieces (e.g. vegetable, meat, *doufu*), ready for direct picking up and eating. Traditionally, Chinese culture considered using knives and forks at the table "barbaric" due to fact that these implements are regarded as weapons. Fish are usually cooked and served whole, with diners directly pulling pieces from the fish with chopsticks to eat, unlike in some other cuisines where they are first filleted. This is because it is desired for fish to be served as fresh as possible. A common Chinese saying "including head and tail" refers to the wholeness and completion of a certain task or, in this case, the display of food.



In a Chinese meal, each individual diner is given their own bowl of rice while the accompanying dishes are served in communal plates (or bowls) which are shared by everyone sitting at the table, a communal service known as "family style" in Western nations. In the Chinese meal, each diner picks food out of the communal plates on a bite-by-bite basis with their chopsticks. This is in contrast to western meals where it is customary to dole out individual servings of the dishes at the beginning of the meal. Many non-Chinese are uncomfortable with allowing a person's individual utensils (which might have traces of saliva) to touch the communal plates; for this hygienic reason, additional serving spoons or chopsticks (common/public/shared chopsticks) may be made available. The food selected is often eaten together with a mouthful of rice.

Vegetarianism is not uncommon or unusual in China, though, as is the case in the West, is still only practiced by a relatively small proportion of the population. The Chinese vegetarian does not eat a lot of tofu, unlike the stereotypical impression in the West. Most Chinese vegetarians are Buddhists. Non-Chinese eating Chinese cuisine will note that a large number of vegetable dishes may actually contain meat, as meat chunks or bits have been traditionally used to flavor dishes. Chinese Buddhist cuisine has many true vegetarian dishes (no meat at all).

For much of China's history, human manure has been used as fertilizer due to the large human population and the relative scarcity of farm animals in China. For this reason, raw food (especially raw vegetables such as salad) has not been part of the traditional Chinese diet. Desserts as such are less typical in Chinese culture than in the West. Chinese meals do not typically end with a dessert or dessert course as is common in Western cuisine. Instead, sweet foods are often introduced during the course of the meal with no firm distinction made. For instance, the *basi* fruit dishes (sizzling sugar syrup coated fruits such as banana or apple) are eaten alongside other savory dishes that would be considered main course items in the West. However, many sweet foods and dessert snacks do exist in Chinese cuisine. Many are fried, and several incorporate red bean paste (*dousha*). The *matuan* and the *doushabao* is filled with *dousha*; it is often eaten for breakfast. Some steamed bun items are filled with *dousha*; some of these are in the shape of peaches, an important Chinese cultural symbol. Another dessert is *Babao Fan* ("Eight Treasure Rice Pudding").

If dessert is served at the end of the meal, by far the most typical choice is fresh fruit, such as sliced oranges. The second most popular choice is a type of sweet soup, typically made with red beans and sugar. This soup is served warm.

In Chinese culture, cold beverages are believed to be harmful to digestion of hot food, so items like ice-cold water or soft drinks are traditionally not served at meal-time. Besides soup, if any other beverages are served, they would most likely be hot tea or hot water. Tea is believed to help in the digestion of greasy foods.

## Typical dishes

Jiaozi - filled dumplings, *guotie*  
Potsticker - shallow fried *jiaozi*



## Noodles

Fried noodles

Noodle soup

Kung Pao chicken

Hotpot - a communal dish that consists of a simmering pot of stock at the center of the dining table.

While the hot pot is kept simmering, ingredients are placed into the pot and are cooked at the table.

Fried pancakes (including green onion pancakes) - a Chinese snack consisting of a non-leavened, salty flatbread infused with oil and minced scallions. Made with dough instead of batter.

Zongzi - rice balls, wrapped in leaves

Peking Duck - the trademark dish of Beijing

Baozi - filled steamed buns

Dim sum - a Chinese light meal or brunch, eaten sometime from morning-to-early afternoon with family or friends. Dim sum consists of a wide spectrum of choices, from sweet to salty. It has combinations of meat, vegetables, seafood, and fruit. It is usually served in a small basket or on a small dish, depending on the type of dim sum.

Steamed fish

Tofu dishes



## Breakfast foods

Century egg (thousand-year old egg, or preserved egg) - made by preserving duck or chicken eggs in a mixture of clay, ash, salt, lime, and rice straw for several weeks to several months, depending on the method of processing.

Tea egg - hard boiled egg soaked or stewed in tea

Congee - rice porridge

Pickled vegetables

Soy milk - in either sweet or salty form

Youtiao - "Cow tongue pastry", or other fried Chinese dough foods

Shaobing - a flaky baked or pan-seared dough pastry

Rice balls - with savory fillings or coatings

Starches

Mantou - steamed bread

White rice

Noodles

*Compiled by Paula Scott, USU Extension, Salt Lake County*

*Source: Wikipedia*

*[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_cuisine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_cuisine)*



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